

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

Report of the Proceedings of the 76th (1980) Autumn Delegate Meeting held at Head Office, 52 Clapham High Street, London, S.W.4.

Saturday, 11th October; 1.50 p.m. to 6.30 p.m.
17 branches represented by 26 delegates. Not represented: Edinburgh; West Yorkshire.

Sunday, 12th October; 11.15 a.m. to 6.30 p.m.
17 branches represented by 25 delegates. Not represented: Edinburgh; West Yorkshire.

Collections: Saturday - £23.83
Sunday - £27.40

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1. Chairman Cde H Vallor (Glasgow) was nominated for the chair. It was Agreed by the delegates that Cde Vallor take the chair.
2. Deputy Chairman It was Agreed no member be appointed at this stage of the proceedings.
3. Late Forms C Redbridge, Glasgow, and Paddington Branches requested permission to sit. It was Agreed they be permitted to sit.
4. Procedure D Delegates Agreed they would take items for discussion with the relevant items on the Executive Committee's Report.
5. Executive Committee's Report to Annual Delegate Meeting for the period 1.1.80 to 30.6.80

- 5.1 Executive Committee Attendances Taken with this was the Paddington Branch Item for Discussion (2) "The Executive Committee's inability to make executive decisions."

Points raised: Executive Committee had dithered in making decisions; continually deferring items (e.g. Marxian Economics Pamphlet, Trade's Union Pamphlet, Draft French Declaration of Principles, Price of Socialist Standard. Party structure should be examined - the Executive Committee to make executive decisions, while routine matters were run by the sub-committees. It was unnecessary for the full Executive Committee to consider leaflets, 2-3 Executive Committee members could consider it off the Executive Committee table and report back the same night by 10 p.m. Executive Committee business must be less now than it was after the war, when the membership was larger. Some Executive Committee members appear afraid to make a decision. With the Economics Pamphlet Conference had put the Executive Committee in a dilemma with the opposing resolutions telling the Executive Committee to both publish it immediately, and vet all pamphlets. A smaller membership need not mean less work (if they are more active). Executive Committee decisions have slowed up because the Executive Committee is trying to consider what is the Party view - they wish to be seen to be democratic.

- 5.2 Branches, Membership & Organisation It was Agreed by the delegates to consider also the three Items for Discussion as follows:

Item 3 NWLondon Branch "The best method of paying dues."

Item 4 Southend Branch "Are due stamps necessary?"

Item 5 Redbridge Branch "The advisability of raising dues to, say, 80p per month (with proportional increase to Head Office) as soon as possible and henceforth the amount of dues payable to be automatically reviewed at each Conference."

The whole item had arisen from when the General Secretary had asked the Executive Committee to be allowed to re-order a supply of dues stamps. If the Treasurer kept records there would be no need for stamps; Head Office could check if a correct amount had been submitted by reference to the Form C. If stamps are the best way to collect the money for Head Office, then okay. An index could be used to regularly review the dues amount and Conference could then agree it. Dues are automatically reviewed by Conference, the amendments to resolution rather than an index gives notice of what is intended. The General Secretary then read the footnote to the 28th Executive Committee Meeting concerning dues stamps with four alternative methods of collection. Dues stamps ensure Head Office gets the money in advance; they are reliable for sloppy organisations. Dues should keep in line with inflation. Stamps can be lost or stolen. It used to be a view of the Party that there should be no dues, or they be kept to a minimum. Opposed to the Executive Committee being given any more powers. The cost of receipts should be considered as well as the cost of printing dues stamps.

6. It was Agreed by Delegates that the Bolton Delegate be allowed to sit despite his credentials not yet being received by Standing Orders Committee.
7. Cde Roddy of Vancouver (Socialist Party of Canada) addressed the Delegates on activities in Canada, U.S.A. and Austria.

5. Executive Committee Report continued

- 5.3 Auditors Report It was Agreed to defer consideration until Sunday when the Auditors would be present.

- 5.4 Estates Management Committee No discussion.

- 5.5 Groups Organiser No discussion.

- 5.6 Propaganda Information Bank No discussion.

- 5.7 Propaganda Committee It was Agreed to take Item for Discussion No. 13.

Islington Branch "The current alarming tensions of world capitalism in 1980 - is the World Socialist movement doing enough?"

Before starting the item for discussion, Delegates considered the question of the Conway Hall Lecture. Delegates were informed that the Executive Committee rescinded their resolution not to hold a Friday night rally, but had not any further resolutions pending hearing the Delegates' views. Delegates who spoke were in favour of a meeting. Suggestions included a film;

EC REPORT (Cont'd)

It was agreed that had not 498 to 515.

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a debate; more use of outside of London speakers; rallies on Sunday were successful as workers had little else to do; video film recorders; the use of posters to advertise meetings in general (the most most effective, but little used in England). The Propaganda Committee said they had noted all that was said and would consider it all. It was suggested a debate would be unlikely on Good Friday (difficulty in getting an opponent); problems with films due to copyright (similar with video tapes).

It was appreciated that members were now more active, but had the effort been worthwhile? In reply, it was suggested that unsuccessful branch meetings were the ones that had not been organized enough. Membership had increased during the half year - 498 to 515. The Propaganda Committee can only exist by co-ordinating work it is informed of and to this end new Forms B were available.

Following the adjournment for tea (4 to 4.30 p.m.) the Item 13 for Discussion was considered. Islington Branch had sent a circular to branches before the Annual Delegate Meeting, which was used as the basis of discussion and which led their Delegates to moving 5 floor resolutions after the discussion. Points raised were: targets would encourage members to work, sell the Socialist Standard, etc.; the Party must be active in dealing with problems which arise in capitalism; need topical leaflets; make a greater use of Head Office; get away from the idea that the Form A is all the education that is needed; the Party should be in a hurry, growth is important; we must carry out our principles vigorously. A branch that is now moribund would have been very active in the past; members must be careful not to burn themselves out; our capacity is limited. By Socialist movement, Islington meant the Socialist Party of Great Britain and the Companion Parties not 'left wing groups'. Knowledge did not end with the Form A, that is where it began. There was a danger of a 'right wing movement' leading the workers - especially in the Midlands. They use similar phrases to us at the first step and we must get the working class beyond that first step. Members' state of mind is important - they are surprised at what they can do when they make up their mind. Do not want to deter enthusiasm, but also do not want to see members disillusioned. Members do not have a sense of urgency - this is wrong - activity makes activity. In the past, the old members and the Socialist Standard had a sense of urgency. There were various reasons why this had gone. The ideas for Socialism are working in the minds of the working class; we should forget about the word dogma, but stress we have a unique case on everything including war .. tell these groups to forget C.N.D. - Women's Lib. - the whole lot - and look at capitalism for what it is and make sure they see we are different. If we do not give the impression of urgency we will appear Utopian. Extra activity need not bring extra members (e.g. Glasgow in the early 60's contested 4 Parliamentary Elections, and even sold pamphlets on the knocker when all their Socialist Standards had been sold, but nothing tangible had been gained). However, we should not sit around. The working class currently yawns at nuclear war, Vietnam - they are indifferent. Socialism does not directly depend on our growth. Members should not be suspicious of each others motives: either the stick-in-the-mud old men, or the young fire brands .. both have their place. We are still alive in a world which has had nuclear weapons for over 30 years and many wars - not (yet) in the capitalists interest to use them. Preference of persuasions and example to pressurising members; better to have a more central Head Office. Our purpose is to provide a focal point for the working class to organise themselves around. The old and tried ways were the best in their time, but need not necessarily be so now and we must get in on the communications revolution (e.g. video). Realistic targets must be set, otherwise members will become disillusioned.

Floor Resolutions, all moved by G. Slapper and S Dowsett (both of Islington Branch)

1. "That this Annual Delegate Meeting recommends that the Party should set a target of printing and selling 7,000 Socialist Standards per month by September, 1981."

Amendment Selwyn & Tanner (Paddington) "Delete 7,000 and replace with 6,000."

Carried 12-8

Amendment D. Davies & M Davies (NWLondon) "Delete 6,000; replace with 5,000."

Lost 4-12 The Sub Resolution was Carried 18-0.

2. "That this Annual Delegate Meeting recommends that the Executive Committee should urge the New Pamphlets Committee to produce regular, topical leaflets for the purpose of mass distribution - 20,000 copies of a leaflet (a mere 1,000 per branch) is the least that should be produced."

Amendment (Cook & Selwyn) "Delete all after 'mass distribution'." Carried 13-8

Sub Resolution Carried 20-0

3. "That this Annual Delegate Meeting recommends that all branches and groups be practically encourages to run at least one outdoor speaking station." Carried 18-0

4. "That this Annual Delegate Meeting recommends that the Executive Committee be urged to set up an enquiry into the use of Head Office."

Amendment Cook (Birmingham) & D Davies (NWLondon) "Insert 'more extensive' between 'the' and 'use of Head Office'." Carried 18-0 Sub Resolution Agreed

5. "That this Annual Delegate Meeting recommends that branches be practically

5.7 Floor Resolution 5. contd ..

at least 4 times a year. The Executive Committee should investigate and report on the Party on branches failing to meet this norm so that there can be full discussion as to how the branch can be helped." Carried 14-5

Annual Delegate Meeting adjourned at 6.30 p.m. Saturday and recommenced at 11.15 a.m. Sunday.

5.8 Auditors Report At the request of the Treasurer the Auditors Report was re-raised. However, there was no discussion.

5.9 Overseas Contacts & International Secretary A branch raised the point that our Austrian comrades seemed to be raising matters of controversy, namely the Nuclear Power Station Referendum. The Overseas Contacts Secretary reported that the Executive Committee had asked a member to write on their behalf, but no reply had been received to this particular letter on the matter, though they had answered 2 other on the issue. It was felt that the BDS was dragging its feet and hoping the Party would drop the matter, but we should be as strict with the Companion Parties as with our own members transgressions. It was felt that criticism should not be harsh in case the BDS collapsed, but had they not taken the line of the left wing Social Democrats in Germany on the T.U. ticket? A Delegate asked if a member who had just returned from Vienna could be contacted by telephone. This was agreed. Discussion continued, points raised being: that there were grounds for concern, but voting 'No' in the referendum is not necessarily the same as the opposite of 'Yes'; the actions were reformist; the actions were politically illadvised, but not reformist; the journal contained advertisements for members business (heating appliances); Jacomb had placed advertisements in the Socialist Standard during the first year; we tell people to put 'VOTE SOCIALIST' on their ballot papers and they should be able to understand this basic issue.

Floor Resolution moved by Vanni & McIlwain (Glasgow) "This Annual Delegate Meeting recommends that the Executive Committee press the Austrian comrades for a reply to our criticism of their participation in an anti-nuclear referendum." The Party's position was not clear, for example Socialist representatives in Parliament would vote NO on War Credits. Not in favour of pressing the issue - they were not a colonial possession.

Addendum moved by D Davies (NW London) & F Ambridge (Swansen) " .. after seeking advice from Cde Lawrence, who had just returned from visiting the Austrian comrades." The Assistant General Secretary reported she had contacted Cde Lawrence, who had been ill during his visit and had seen Cde Falk only. It was nonsense to say that they were Social Democrats - one or two were certainly very sound. The addendum was withdrawn with the agreement of the Delegates. A Delegate asked "had not other Companion Parties strayed in the past?" Non-Socialist activity is reformist - will bring in non-Socialists and weaken the Socialists' strength. Try and help them by saying its wrong and put the sound members on their mettle. If a statement is issued contrary to our stand, we must criticise: saying it is not our position. If they diverge then they are simply not in agreement. The "NO" was at the end of a long article. When the Party considered the European Economic Community referendum, we would have tolerated no-one say "No". The journal should not be in the hands of a member advertising revenue. The vote was Lost 11-13

5.10 Publicity Committee No discussion.

5.11 Head Office Assistant The Head Office Assistant considered that Head Office needed someone in attendance four or five days per week and if someone was found she would happily give up the job in January.

5.12 Central Branch Secretaries No discussion.

5.13 Ballot Committee No discussion.

6. At this point Delegates complained that not enough copies of the Executive Committee's Report had been received, as well as a number of reports being received late. The General Secretary apologised, assuring delegates this would not happen next time; it had clearly resulted due to a misunderstanding of the numbers of reports wanted by branches and Executive Committee sub committees submitting their reports too late.

5.14 Socialist Standard Production Committee Policy of themes not liked if too often used, as they effected sales. Too many mistakes in proof reading. Special issues directed interest and were an aid to sales. In the 'Benn Interview' we should have attacked Labour's Clause 4 'means of exchange'. In reply, the Socialist Standard Production Committee said 'Benn' was an innovation, not a secret. The problem in the article was to summarise an interview to be readable. Regarding themes, they were in a difficulty - proof reading was difficult, they tried to be careful, but afterwards could only print a correction.

North East Branch Item for Discussion No. 8 "Should more space in the Socialist Standard be spent on Socialist theory?" Opener asked if, when theory was put in the Socialist Standard, could it be put in a simpler fashion. More difficult items could be included in a periodical, inserted quarterly in the Socialist Standard - possibly an extra sum could be paid. Somethings can only be expressed in a difficult way, no matter how simply expressed. More theoretical articles wanted on

Science and Historical Materialism to explain how capitalism works using examples. We need a balanced Standard and want people to continue buying after the first time. Articles should stress Socialist theory's uniqueness: good if they are also popular. The Socialist Standard is a propaganda journal primarily to present and prove correctness of our case. Therefore, it must be simple and not highly theoretical. Socialist Standard has no chance to be newsworthy. It is hard to be historical and up-to-date; the old Socialist Standard was successful as it took capitalism's institutions and applied our alternative, showing what they were and would be. Conference told the Socialist Standard Production Committee to include theoretical articles. There should be no need to spoil articles with caricatures and distortions. The whole of the working class is not necessarily destitute, nor are all the capitalists necessarily absent. There is never any need for us to say anything that is untrue.

North West London Branch Item for Discussion No. 9 "Methods of determining increases in the price of the Socialist Standard." was combined with Paddington Branch Item for Discussion No. 10 "The delay in raising the price of Socialist Standard and the factors determining price increases."

The Executive Committee, to date, had not raised the price. Should the Executive Committee review the price each year? Should the Socialist Standard make a profit or just cover the cost of production or be subsidised? It had been 15p since 1976 and 20p would just cover costs. It could be 25p by next Conference.

Floor Resolution: Selwyn & Smith (Paddington) "This Delegate Meeting recommends to the Executive Committee that the price of the Socialist Standard be raised to 20p from the November issue." The Party needed a dynamic, but uncumbersome process to determine the price because of inflation. It could be left to the Executive Committee. The Party should subsidise the Socialist Standard. It is in placed already hard to set it at 15p - 25p would increase sales resistance and work against the target set yesterday. The Executive Committee does have the power by Conference to determine the price and does not need to leave it to Annual Delegate Meeting or Conference. It must be recognised subsidies come from somewhere, and we must not depend on legacies to continue the Socialist Standard. The effect of a price rise is more on the seller than the buyer of the Socialist Standard. No regular sales had been lost by price rises. The Executive Committee may have delayed putting the price up as they would probably have wanted the Party behind them on such an important issue. Ask the Executive Committee to recommend a price each year to Conference. Concerning costs: would the Party wish the discount to branches who order over 3 dozen to be stopped? The Floor Resolution was Carried 18-2.

Birmingham Branch Item for Discussion No. 11 "The unsatisfactory pictorial contents of the Socialist Standard." Many illustrations were not relevant to their articles. Too many illustrations. They should be used only when they save words by 'saying' more in the same space. Pictures were not objected to in principle. They provided necessary relief to the pages of text. Pictures on the cover help sell the Socialist Standard; they attract people to it. Illustrations had the advantage of: illustrating a point in the text (difficult to achieve); giving relief to text and finally, though rarely, making a point in themselves. For the Socialist Standard Production Committee, it was stated illustrations were not going in at the expense of words - using the smaller typeface, the word count in the October, 1980 Socialist Standard was 18,500 compared to 14,500 in January, 1978; books have always used illustrations since before printing even; agreed some were not good and appealed for photos; would like graphs, charts and photos in a vast bank. Members could check quality by putting a tissue over the black and white picture and that would show the result after being printed. A member(s) could take photographs in liaison with the Socialist Standard Production Committee. All should have a caption, as not everyone may read the text at the time they see the picture. In canvassing the Socialist Standard 'on the knocker' a good illustrated cover is helpful.

Annual Delegate Meeting adjourned from 2 p.m. to 2.50 p.m.

5.15 Central Organiser No discussion.

5.16 Literature Secretary There were 1,250 copies of the War Pamphlet at Head Office.

5.17 New Pamphlets Committee Taken with this were Items for Discussion No. 6

North West London Branch "The interpretation of Conference 1980 Resolution 6 A (Carried 27-21) which reads 'That this Conference endorses the recommendation of the 1979 Delegate Meeting that the Executive Committee adhere to the practice of reading the drafts of pamphlets at the Executive Committee table, thus ensuring that any errors, ambiguity or unsound arguments occurring in the text are dealt with prior to publication', and what constitutes a pamphlet?"

In the event of a future series of articles in the same form as the Marxian Economics Pamphlet, they should be vetted by the Executive Committee. It had been expected the Executive Committee would have vetted the Marxian Economics Pamphlet. It was to

Production Committee for pamphlets. The New Pamphlets Committee had been asked to report on it and all the points they had made were accepted. There was no reason to change the present way. The present way was not necessarily the best. The delays on issuing the Marxian Economics Pamphlets were mainly due to printing problems. It was not easy to correct a mistake in a pamphlet being one-off, unlike the continuous Socialist Standard. Some members could see no contradiction in the two resolutions passed at Conference. Pamphlets could be produced quicker without loss in quality.

7. At the request of the General Secretary, it was agreed to send the Delegates' Fraternal Greetings to all the Companion Parties.

5.17 contd .. B Item for Discussion No. 7 Birmingham Branch "The Marxian Economics Pamphlets." Cottis (Southend) and Vanni (Glasgow) "Next business." Agreed

5.17 contd .. C Item for Discussion No. 12 Islington Branch "Is it necessary for the Party's Declaration of Principles and Object to appear on all leaflets advertising propaganda meetings."

The Islington Branch Delegate expanded their case, which had been made in their circular. They included: the problems of typing a stencil; reproduction; the Declaration of Principles inhibited the flow of reading; they favoured the object appearing. We must recognise conditions have changed over the years. No Declaration of Principles would reduce printing costs. Labour Party uses 'common ownership' but has no Declaration of Principles.

Floor Resolution E. G. Slapper and Grant (Islington Branch) "That this Annual Delegate Meeting recommends that it should not be a requirement that leaflets advertising a meeting with text included must on all occasions carry the Declaration of Principles."

Amendment Cottis and Wilson (Southend Branch) "Insert 'very limited' before 'text'."

Most people who receive a leaflet do not attend the meeting, therefore give them something to read instead. Duplicated leaflets cost between £5 and £10 per 1,000. Delegates heard the 1938 and 1971 Conference resolutions on the matter and it was decided the Floor Resolutions were in order. The Amendment was lost 10-12 The Resolution was Carried 15-6.

5.18 Forms A Committee No discussion.

5.19 Tapes Committee No discussion.

5.20 Review Journals Secretary No discussion.

5.21 Library Committee No discussion.

5.22 Estates Management Committee No discussion.

5.23 Book Department No discussion.

5.24 Education Committee and Education Organiser Under this heading were taken:

A Lewisham Branch Item for Discussion No. 14 "The present Education Bulletins; their contents and purpose." B Camden Branch Item for Discussion No. 15 "The Education Committee's Discussion Bulletins."

They are of great value, but need classes to go with them. The effort put into them has not been fully used and they had become an end in themselves. They should be more practical as not all members have the time to fully research items before putting them over to non-Socialists. They are difficult to understand. Found stimulating for discussion, but should not be treated as gospel. Delegates discussed the influence or not of Spencer on early members, as well as other early influences. Education classes had been poorly attended - possibly as members tend to vote with their feet when frightened off by material. There will always be questions we cannot answer. We need an elementary set of classes, based on the Speakers Test Questions. We need to transmit knowledge in an encouraging way. The Education Committee stated the Bulletins had been based on the discussion at classes; they maintained a mailing list for those members who especially wanted a copy otherwise a few were sent to each branch; at the end of each bulletin questions were added so that members could correspond, but these would not be published; future classes would be simpler; the committee felt members were trying to stab them in the back. It was also reported that there had been problems in distributing copies through Head Office and it was felt that this may have been over unclear instructions.

5.25 Press Officer No discussion.

5.26 Socialist Standard Subscribers' Committee No discussion.

A motion to adopt the Executive Committee's Report to 1980 Annual Delegate Meeting was Agreed being moved by D. Davies (North West London Branch) and H Cottis (Southend).

5.24 contd .. C Paddington Branch Item for Discussion No. 16 "What is the most effective form of education for the Party and for whom should it cater?" Delegates expressed their pleasure that education was being discussed.

be hoped the Executive Committee could develop a system like the Socialist Production Committee for pamphlets. The New Pamphlets Committee had been asked to report on it and all the points they had made were accepted. There was no reason to change the present way. The present way was not necessarily the best. The delays on issuing the Marxian Economics Pamphlets were mainly due to printing problems. It was not easy to correct a mistake in a pamphlet being one-off, unlike the continuous Socialist Standard. Some members could see no contradiction in the two resolutions passed at Conference. Pamphlets could be produced quicker without loss in quality.

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Amendment Cottis and Wilson (Southend Branch) "Insert 'very limited' before 'text'."

Most people who receive a leaflet do not attend the meeting, therefore give them something to read instead. Duplicated leaflets cost between £5 and £10 per 1,000. Delegates heard the 1938 and 1971 Conference resolutions on the matter and it was decided the Floor Resolutions were in order. The Amendment was lost 10-12 The Resolution was Carried 15-6.

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Items for Discussion Remaining

8.1 North West London Branch - No. 17 "Electoral Activity."

Branches should have a committee room, show they are active and committed. It was appreciated Bolton intended standing at the next General Election. In London, the GLC Elections should be contested, they required no deposit and we could make an impact if several branches stood. Use the freepost and Central Branch members to write the envelopes. Even if we have no candidates in a constituency, we should regard ourselves as 'contesting' and be active as best we can. We need more forward and systematic planning - the 25 point questionnaire used at Bolton was very encouraging.

8.2 Paddington Branch - No. 1 "Should a period of time be set aside at Conference for dealing with Items for Discussion not linked to instructed resolutions?"

We need a more organised Conference; particular times for certain items; it is unsatisfactory for the General Secretary initiating matters by the order he draws up the Executive Committee Report; should go by the Agenda and fit the Executive Committee Report into it, not the other way round. Could not the Standing Orders Committee, who drew up the Agenda, work closer with the General Secretary? Delegates always have the authority to decide the order of business. A half hour could be set aside for delegates to consider the order of business. The whole work of the Party, contained in the Executive Committee Report, must be looked at.

Annual Delegate Meeting adjourned at 6.30 p.m.

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